



**Wider Opportunities for Women**

**Testimony**  
**Supporting the Connecticut Permanent Commission on the Status of Women**

**Submitted by Wider Opportunities for Women**  
**February 17, 2010**

Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) appreciates the opportunity to submit comments in support of preserving the unique mission of and continuing the vital work of the Connecticut Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. This dynamic organization has achieved numerous successes on behalf of Connecticut women, women who contribute to the state's coffers and women who contribute to the stability of families, communities and work forces. WOW encourages Connecticut lawmakers to continue to fully fund the work of the PCSW as the PCSW has proven its ability to produce data-driven results from expanding public awareness of what it takes for Connecticut families to make ends meet to forward-thinking legislative initiatives that facilitate the economic security, health and well-being of women and their families.

It has been WOW's distinct honor to work in partnership with the PCSW for many years as we built and continue to enhance the body of knowledge known as the Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project. This effort has included the production of a Self-Sufficiency Standard for the state and contributions to the release of the PCSW's report, "Overlooked and Undercounted: Where Connecticut Stands." More recently WOW and the PCSW have collectively embarked on a mission, the Elder Economic Security Initiative, to determine the baseline needs of Connecticut's seniors to determine the income levels which would allow seniors to age in place with economic security for themselves and to maintain the dignity they deserve. The new Elder Economic Security Standard Index for the Five Connecticut's will be released by PCSW, in partnership with WOW, in early March. Without the PCSW in Connecticut, WOW would lose an invaluable partner in this effort. The testimony that follows outlines our support and rationale for maintaining in its current form and function, the Connecticut Permanent Commission on the Status of Women.

For more than 40 years, WOW has been a dynamic organization, seeking to improve the economic well-being of women and girls through advocacy, organizing, coalition-building, training, and public awareness activities. WOW has and continues to work throughout the country and in Washington, D.C. fighting for programs and resources to prepare women and girls for jobs that will support their families and them. For example, WOW developed the country's first women's employment resource center women and nurtured similar centers around the U.S. WOW helped define .non-traditional occupations (NTOs) for women, advocated for federal laws to increase women's participation in NTOs by giving women the skills to earn high wages and economic security and undertook demonstration projects around the country. WOW demonstrates the interconnectedness of issues from child care, reproductive health and welfare policies to tax policies, workforce and economic development. From teen-focused programs like the Connections to Career series to those assessing the economic impact of long-term care for seniors, WOW addresses issues affecting women and their families today—within and across generations—work that compliments and contributes to the work of the PCSW.

WOW applauds the work of the PCSW over its 35-year history, a history marked with momentous victories working in partnership with the state legislature including the first family and medical leave protections and more recent work on adequately compensating Connecticut's child care workers. The PCSW team has testified on over 75 bills before this legislative body, providing expert testimony to lawmakers at no additional cost to the state. By providing training services to state employees at no cost, the PCSW instills necessary learning including sexual harassment awareness and prevention training and allows the state to realize savings by not having to let contracts for this work.

The PCSW's work does not stop at the doors to capitol. The PCSW reaches across the state to provide training services including a young women's leadership program, pre-apprenticeship training and other training for women who work in the trades. Indicative of the PCSW's willingness to bring like-minded and disparate mindsets to the table, the commission has led or participated in over 25 coalitions and 12 task forces in the last year alone. These efforts to coalesce partners, to produce consensus and find solutions comes at much less than its market value by having the PCSW engaged. The expense to the state in the absence of a PCSW extend well beyond the lack of cohesiveness engendered among advocates without coalitions to the price of having policy work produced at a fee by outside providers or the stunted leadership skills of the next generation without access to the commission's leadership program or the cost to the state's coffers of revenues lost when women are not paid fairly in the workplace.

WOW is proud to be numbered among the many partners of the PCSW. As mentioned, WOW leads the Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project in 37 states and the District of Columbia. WOW's new Elder Economic Security Initiative assists policymakers, advocates, and providers in twelve states develop programs so seniors may age in place with dignity and economic security. The PCSW in Connecticut is a valued partner in both efforts. Through these projects WOW and our partners are helping to change the public dialogue from one of poverty to one of economic security at the national level and in state legislatures. In this instance, the PCSW's continued existence insures state lawmakers, advocates and voters in Connecticut will have access to the most current data, policies and best practices from across the nation—all flowing through the analytical lens offered to CT opinion-makers, policy-makers, practitioners and residents by the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. On more than one occasion the work of the PCSW has made Connecticut the model for the nation including the commission's pre-apprenticeship training program.

I must mention that many of our state partners find themselves somewhat envious of Connecticut as they have no government entities which have as their mission the identification of issues affecting the status of women and the provision of leadership and information to policy-makers and the public in order to improve the status of women. Without a centralized repository of research, without a designated liaison to their legislative bodies, without an entity charged with the oversight, coordination and assessment of programs and practices in state agencies as they affect women, our colleagues in many other states can only wish for the resource you have here in the CT PCSW. The foresight of your forbearers in creating the PCSW certainly underscores the leadership Connecticut has offered so many times dating to an era before our nation existed. Let not that foresight or that leadership be lost today.

WOW's board of directors, staff and partner organizations across the country stand with the PCSW. We know that policy-makers face a strained budget and must look for ways to reduce expenses. However, further reducing the resources committed to the Connecticut Permanent Commission on the Status of Women presents a cost to the families of Connecticut that they simply cannot afford, a cost which will be borne out across generations from this day forward, and may well mark the end of significant gains for women in this state. Without the PCSW who will speak for your constituents? For women in the workforce? For families who face the struggles of caring for children and aging parents? For women who are denied necessary health care or face exponentially increasing health insurance costs? For families who depend on two incomes to make ends meet but lack access to quality benefits such as time to attend parent-teacher conferences or to take children or parents to medical appointments? For struggling women laid off in the current economic crisis but ineligible for unemployment insurance? Who will rally for them and present you with policy options that ease the burden on Connecticut families and contribute to a higher standard of living in this state? Who, without the PCSW?

We respect the need to balance the state's budget, but we request that you not do so by eliminating such a respected and vigilant entity as the PCSW. Indeed, we would ask that you restore the funding loss already suffered by the PCSW as an indication of your commitment to honoring the permanent nature of the commission and the ongoing need for its work in economic and financial security, health and safety, and anti-discrimination efforts by restating your support and by fully funding the Connecticut Permanent Commission on the Status of Women.

If you have any questions or would like additional information about our work with the PCSW, please contact us as directed below. Thank you for your time and your consideration.

Humbly submitted this day, February 17th, in the year, 2010, by,

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